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CHARISM AND THE CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

The rapid social, political, and cultural changes at the end of the nineteenth and at the dawn of the twentieth centuries are felt even today. Yet, the Church of that time was still predominantly European concerning her *wellanschauung*, discipline, and exercise of authority. In addition, “the strong resistance of the institutional church to the uncertainties of the post-Enlightenment world along with the maintenance of a nineteenth-century fortress identity at its institutional center had set up tensions within the various European Catholic communities.”¹ How did this mentality influence the communities of religious life and their awareness of being bearers of a charism?

In answer to this question, this paper will examine the historical and theological evolution of the consecrated life and charism during the three phases of this epoch: the pre-conciliar period, the duration of Vatican II from 1962-1965, and the post-conciliar time, including the pontificate of John Paul II. During the course of these three periods the understanding of charism as well as the concept of the religious life underwent drastic changes, which are still being implemented to this day.

I. Before Vatican II

At the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century religious life existed by all accounts solely in the northern hemisphere. Its members distinguished themselves from the baptized by belonging to “the state of perfection” which not only established a dialectical tension within the cultural context but at times strained their relationship with ecclesial authorities as well.² The repression of European religious congregations and communities during the *Kulturkampf* in addition to the ravage of two world wars created new threats to

¹ Maryanne Confoy, “Religious Life in the Vatican II Era: ‘State of Perfection’ or Living Charism?” *Theological Studies* 74.2 (2013: 321-46), 322.

² Traditionally, bishops and religious belong to the state of perfection in the Church. This term has been misunderstood and still evokes raised eyebrows. The state of perfection does not shed light on the subjective state of holiness of an individual. Rather, the state indicates the condition of the freedom for undivided surrender to God and His will. This condition of permanent commitment objectively elevates the meritorious value of acts of charity. Cf. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica* II-II 184, 4.

their existence. In their struggle for survival many congregations opted to send members overseas while at home their numbers decreased. Alarmed by the declining numbers of vocations, by aging and overworked religious, and above all by the endangered spiritual life of religious communities, bishops took a new look at the religious life. They ascertained that the difficulties faced by religious concerned to a large part the incompatibility of the required monastic practices with their ministerial demands. Yet, besides the established orders, congregations and societies, there were hardly any other options available for those, especially women, called to a commitment to the evangelical counsels in service to the church.

1.1. Charism in the Magisterial Teaching

The term charism appears scarcely in pre-Vatican teaching.³ In the documents of the First Vatican Council the only mention of charism can be found in the Constitution *Pastor aeternus* where it refers to the charism of infallibility given to the successor of Peter.⁴ On the threshold of the twentieth century Leo XIII confirmed that the Church is directed by the Magisterium. He regarded charisms as extraordinary gifts that do not belong to the structure of the Church and are a marginal phenomenon. This reluctance may be based primarily on the theological vagueness of the term. The apostle of the charism, St. Paul, refers to charism in different contexts and with ambiguous meaning, probably because of the etymological root according to which charism is a special concretization of grace (charis). It is undisputed, however, that he used the term to draw attention to the Holy Spirit as the origin of every charism. The one who receives a charism is to use it in the service of the Body of Christ to awaken and keep the faith in the Church (Rm 12:3b; 6b).⁵ The discussion on the ecclesial role of charisms initiated by the Protestant theologians Adolf von

³ See: Libero Gerosa, *Charisma und Recht: kirchenrechtliche Überlegungen zum Urcharisma der neuen Vereinigungsformen in der Kirche*, (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1989), 35-36. Mario Midali, *La famiglia salesiana: identità carismatica e spirituale* (Roma: LAS, 2010), 47. Christoph Hegge, *Rezeption und Charisma* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1999), 111; Giancarlo Rocca, *Il carisma del fondatore* (Milano: Ancora, 1998), 21-22.

⁴ Peter Hünemann, Helmut Hoping, Robert L. Fastiggi, Anne E. Nash, and Heinrich Denzinger. *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 3071.

⁵ See the insightful discourse of Joseph Ratzinger, "Bemerkungen zur Frage der Charismen in der Kirche." Heinrich Schlier, Günther Bornkamm, Karl Rahner. *Die Zeit Jesu: Festschrift für Heinrich Schlier* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1970), 261-65. More detailed: Libero Gerosa, *Charisma und Recht*, 45-57, 106-07; Fabio Ciardi, *Menschen des Geistes: Zu einer Theologie des Gründercharismas* (Vallendar-Schönstatt: Patris Verlag, 1987), 33-40. Fabio Ciardi, *A la Escucha del Espíritu: Hermenéutica del Carisma de los Fundadores*, (Madrid: Publicaciones Claretianas, 1998), 71-83; Midali, *Identità carismatica*, 41-79; Christoph Hegge, *Rezeption und Charisma*, 35.

Harnack and Rudolph Sohm signals one of the most famous disputes in the history of theology at the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century and undoubtedly advanced the effort of Catholic theology to revert to the original concept of charism.⁶

Yet, the magisterium was hesitant to speak of a founder's charism. Pius XI emphasized the *paternitas* and legislative authority of the founder as substantial elements of his or her identity. Moreover, he pointed to the exemplary life of the founder as an invitation for imitation.⁷ However, there is no mention of the relationship of the founder to his or her community nor do we find any statement on the need to remain loyal to or act according to the spirit of the founder.

At the same time the awakening of a remarkable interest concerning spirituality can be observed. In 1931 Pius XI with his Apostolic Constitution *Deus Scientiarum* adds Asceticism and Mystical Theology as subjects of Catholic Theology. With Pius XII began a strong movement of inner renewal of religious life.⁸ His encyclical *Mystici corporis* promulgated on June 29, 1943, makes reference to the Pauline interpretation of charism and emphasizes that the charismatic as well as the hierarchical dimension belong to the basic structure of the Church since both are directed towards building up the mystical body of Christ. For this reason *Mystici Corporis* marks one of the most important pre-conciliar milestones concerning the development of the understanding of charism. It is above all Karl Rahner who develops the charismatic dimension of the Church. Rahner's ecclesiology hinges on the distinction between the interior charismatic order of grace and its external sign and cause in the institutional order.⁹

⁶ Virginia Parodi, „Beziehung zum Gründer und Treue zum Gründungsscharisma in der nachkonziliaren Theologie sowie in geistlichen Neu-Gründungen des 20. Jahrhunderts,“ (Val-lendar-Schönstatt: Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule, Dissertation, 2006), 21. This article has profited much from this erudite research.

⁷ Pius XI, “Epistola Apostolica *Unigenitus Dei Filius*,” AAS 16 (1924), 135. It appears that the two terms *pater et legifer* essentially describe the authority and specific function of a founder during this time leading up to and even during the Council.

⁸ Pius XII's Encyclical *Sacra Virginitas* (1954) and his Apostolic Constitutions *Sponsa Christi* (1950) and *Sedes Sapientiae* (1956) indicated concrete ways of renewal.

⁹ Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come*, transl. and introd. by Edward Quinn (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), 113. Rahner envisions the possibility of strong charismatic personalities among the laity in the congregation, whom the official priest-leader would respect as such, and who might very well exercise a greater influence on the community than his own. See also: Karl Rahner, *The Charismatic Element in the Church* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964) 42-83.

1. 2. Consecrated Life and Charism

The many communities with a religious and charitable orientation—later called congregations—which came about in the nineteenth century give testimony to creative timely dimensions of the *sequela Christi*. Yet, unlike their predecessors who brought forth a large variety of charisms, many of these congregations adopted already existing rules that suited their ministry. In addition, they practiced some of the popular devotions of the time and naturally adhered to the basic prayers required of religious life. “But a particular spirituality—a distinct expression of one facet of devotion which issues in a way of reacting and acting towards the apostolate as well as in the prayer life—seems never to have been an intrinsic part of their structure.”¹⁰ They were founded for an apostolic task with little reflection on a spiritual *modus operandi*. Thus, in place of their charism or spirituality, they enumerated their specific ministries in their constitutions.

By placing more emphasis on the legal and institutional perspective of the religious life than on the respective profile and charism of individual communities the magisterium indirectly condoned this practice.¹¹ Canonist Enid Williamson argues that “these seeming denials or curbing of the charism of institutes arose from situations over which the Church *per se* had little or no control.”¹² The fact that for example the political conditions in Europe prevented the completion of the First Vatican Council (1869-70) made it impossible to examine the evolution of the religious life on a world-wide basis. As these institutes developed, the true nature of their identity became increasingly more obscure. Not only did this development affect the vocation and ministry of a particular community; it also undermined the importance of a charism.¹³

Around the same time we observe an emergence of new associations who at first sight do not meet the prevailing canonical standards of the state of perfection.¹⁴ The so-called *Pious Unions* broke the barriers of convent walls and

¹⁰ Enid Williamson, “The Notion of Charism in the Religious Life,” *Studia Canonica* 19 (1985, 1:99-116), 102-103.

¹¹ Cf. Leo XIII, Apostolic Constitution *Condilae a Christo*, December 8, 1900. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* XX (Città del Vaticano: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis), 317-327. The 1917 Code of Canon Law had prompted a more juridical dimension of religious life that was not characteristic of previous eras.

¹² Enid Williamson, *The Notion of Charism in the Religious Life*, 101.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 106

¹⁴ The *Code of Canon Law* (CIC) 1917 includes in the section on the right of associations of the laity (*De fidelium associationibus*, cc. 682-725) the following three possibilities: Third Orders (*Tertii Ordines seculares*, cc. 702-706), pious associations and confraternities (*piæ uniones et confraternitates*, cc. 707-719). Usually these lay associations were in some way affiliated to a

opted for religious life *in* the world while others preferred not to be associated with the religious life at all.¹⁵ Some of the former were recognized canonically in 1947 as Secular Institutes (SI) through the promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*. Members of Secular Institutes are either consecrated laity or secular clergy who pledge themselves to living the evangelical counsels in the world for the sake of the mission of sanctifying the world.¹⁶ As can be expected, these institutes were met with skepticism “and treated as if they were unable to live the full religious life of apostolic congregations” since prior to the phenomenon of SIs the practice of the evangelical counsels belonged to religious alone.¹⁷ And even after *Provida Mater* the dispute continued whether or not non-clerical members of SIs can be considered laity and still belong to the consecrated life.¹⁸

1950 can be considered a milestone for the religious life! Pius XII convened the First General Congress of the States of Perfection, calling to Rome the superiors general of religious orders—both men and women—from around the world to launch an assessment of religious life.¹⁹ Never before had they

religious order. Independent lay communities founded during the first half of the twentieth century, i.e. before Vatican II, received very little attention or status in the church.

¹⁵ The founder of Opus Dei, Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer for example, rejects the notion that his work is the first recognized Secular Institute. In a letter dated December 29, 1947 he wrote: “We never intended to belong to the state of perfection. Quite the opposite; we always said that everyone needs to attain Christian perfection in the midst of the world according to their state in life.” See: Amadeo Fuenmayor, Valentin Gómez-Iglesias, and Maestre J. L. Illanes, *Die Prälatur Opus Dei: Zur Rechtsgeschichte eines Charismas: Darstellungen, Dokumente, Statuten* (Essen: Ludgerus Verlag, 1994), 177, my translation.

¹⁶ *Code of Canon Law* (Washington, D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1983), 710-730. B. M. Ottinger, and A. S. Fischer, *Secular Institutes in the 1983 Code: A New Vocation in the Church* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, Inc, 1988). Giancarlo Rocca, *Donne Religiose: Contributo a Una Storia della Condizione Femminile in Italia nei Secoli XIX-XX* (Roma: Edizioni Paoline, 1992), 249. Rocca notes that such institutes were emerging already a hundred years before *Provida Mater*. Due to ambiguous notions of secularity and the meaning of religious life these communities were not accepted within the state of perfection of religious life in the CIC of 1917.

¹⁷ Enid Williamson, *The Notion of Charism in the Religious Life*, 105.

¹⁸ See the dispute between Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Rahner. Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Das Wagnis der Säkularinstitute,” *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio*, 10 (1981: 238-245), 239. Karl Rahner, „Bemerkungen zur Theologie der Säkular Institute,“ *Orientierung* 20 (1956:87-96), 95.

¹⁹ Pius XII, *Menti nostrae* (September 23, 1950), *Acta apostolicae sedis* 42 (1950), 657-702. Friedrich Wulf, “Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life,” trans. Ronald Walls. *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 5 vols., ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967-1969, 2:301-70), 301, points out that an account of Pius XII’s efforts at renewal of religious life can be found in P. Lombardi, S.J., “Il rinnovamento dei religiosi,” *Civiltà Cattolica* 100.1 (March 12, 1949) 615-29.

gathered nor did they ever deliberate together on their mission for and contribution to the Church!²⁰ The outcome of this and other consecutive conferences generated two basic postulates pertinent for the state of perfection: return “to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time.” The two summonses will become the objective of Vatican II’s Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*.²¹

II. Vatican Council II

Among the bishops calling for a less juridical approach to religious life at the Council were Cardinals Julius Döpfner, Léon Joseph Suenens, and Bishop Gérard-Maurice-Eugène Huyghe. Above all, Döpfner played a significant role in shaping the documents on the Church and on Religious Life. “He argued for the importance of recognizing the foundations of a religious vocation in Christ and in the life of the church and the importance of moving beyond the perspective focused simply on personal salvation.”²²

The term *donum* (gift) appears seventy-four times and *charism* is used eleven times in the council documents.²³ Three council documents in particular insinuate an evolving understanding of charism for the consecrated life: the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (LG), the Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis* (PC), and the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (AA).²⁴

II.1. The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*

The Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* holds the hermeneutical key to the entire teaching of Vatican II since the *ductus operandi* inherent to all conciliar reflection and work was concerned with the nature of the Church.²⁵

²⁰ Another World Congress was convoked in 1957, followed by many regional congresses.

²¹ Paul VI, Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis* (October 28, 1965), 2.

²² Confoy, Religious Life in the Vatican II Era, 325. Friedrich Wulf, Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life, 305, 319, 368.

²³ Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* (November 18, 1965), 8, 2. LG 12, 2; 25,3; 30; 50,1. AA 3, 3-4; 30,11. Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes* (December 7, 1965), 23,1; 28,1. Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (December 7, 1965), 4, 2; 9, 3.

²⁴ Although AA does not explicitly address the charisms of the new ecclesial communities, the decree nevertheless includes impulses for their development and recognition by the Church.

²⁵ Cf. L.-J. Suenens, “A Plan for the Whole Council,” Al. Stacpoole (ed.), *Vatican II Revisited by Those Who Were There* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1986), 88-105. Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II, *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of Vatican II* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 36; cf. 39, 203, 420. Luis Fernando Figari, “Una eclesiología de comunión y reconcili-

Chapters IV, V and VI contain significant theological statements for the theology of charisms. By placing chapter V—"The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church"—between the fourth chapter on the "Laity" and the sixth chapter on the "Religious," the Council Fathers may have wanted to bridge the gap between these two states of life, rather than to underpin a theological and canonical differentiation "for the sake of perfection."²⁶ When presented with the first schema of *Lumen Gentium* in 1963 some Council Fathers criticized, that the spiritual dimension of the church had not been sufficiently taken into account. They insisted that the charismatic nature of the Church should be emphasized as a necessary complement to the official hierarchical structure. The need for a return to the pneumatological dimension of the church had been a contentious summons during the early sessions of the council.²⁷

As a result, *Lumen Gentium* clarifies that charisms belong to the essence of the Church. The six passages which mention the term are significant since they distinguish charism from the other gifts of the Spirit. *Lumen Gentium* 4 highlights the work of the Spirit who dwells in the Church and "directs [her] with hierarchical and charismatic gifts." Both kinds of gifts have the same origin and are equally important. In order to prevent the risk of ambiguity concerning the relationship of office and charism, *Lumen Gentium* 7.3 clarifies that "among these gifts is the grace of the apostles to whose authority the Spirit Himself subjected even those who were endowed with charisms."²⁸ Accordingly, religious charisms are ratified by virtue of their relationship to the hierarchy and to the entire body of Christ. The Pauline context of *Lumen Gentium* 7 serves as basis for *Lumen Gentium* 12 which clarifies the theological classification of charisms by distinguishing between ordinary and extraordinary gifts. In particular, article 12 emphasizes that charisms are always at the service of renewal and the full edification of the Church.

Lumen Gentium 30 underlines that the Spirit of God also bestows charisms on lay people; this acknowledgement implies the equality of all believers in access to and active participation in the distribution of charisms. Nevertheless, the broad base for receiving such gifts is modified in *Lumen Gentium* 50 which

ación," Augusto Vargas Alzamora. *Vigencia y proyección del Concilio Vaticano II* (Lima: Vida y Espiritualidad, 1996), 35.

²⁶ Cf. Jean Marie Renfro, "Religious charism: definition, rediscovery and implication." *Review for Religious* 45 (1986:520-530). José Cristo Rey García Paredes, *Teología de la vida religiosa* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2000), 113.

²⁷ See: Antonio Augusto Romano, *The Charism of the Founders: The Person and Charism of Founders in Contemporary Theological Reflection* (Slough: St Pauls, 1994), 57.

²⁸ Christoph Hegge, *Rezeption und Charisma*, 119 f.

asserts that “divine charisms” distinguish all those who excel in the practice of the Christian life.

Thus *Lumen Gentium* highlights the common origin of hierarchical and charismatic gifts, and their equal recognition by the Church. Charisms are not given automatically through baptism, nor are they part and parcel of the sacrament of ordination; they are likewise not to be reduced to a personal gift or talent one has received.²⁹ Believers who receive a charism are charged to offer it as a service to the renewal of the Church. “Without charismatic stimuli ‘from below’,” writes Wulf, the life of the Church would often subside into torpor; many wounds would go unhealed and many crises unresolved.”³⁰ Although *Lumen Gentium* avoids using the word charism as directly related to the endowment of founders, *Lumen Gentium* 50 may help us in situating the charisms of founders or foundations of the consecrated life within the Church. Like all spiritual gifts, the charism given to founders of religious communities contributes an essential and creative part to the loving awakening, healing, solving and governing in the service of the Church. It seems essential then that a founder’s charism is passed on to his followers who treasure it and are nourished by its life-giving spirit.

II.2. *The Decree Perfectae Caritatis*

As was to be expected, the challenges faced by those involved in drafting the Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis* were enormous. At issue was to once again point to the essence of religious life and to clarify that the “stylized and ritualized ways of living, dressing, and apostolic service” were only secondary to the efforts aiming at renewal and adaptation.³¹

While the preparatory document *De statibus perfectionis aquirendae* viewed religious life as a state of perfection with an ascetic, religious, and disciplinary perspective, *Perfectae Caritatis* emphasizes the relevance of the charismatic dimension for the identity and the future of communities of the consecrated life. The two year process moving from the first draft of 1962 “on the states acquiring perfection” to *De religiosis* and *De accommodata renovatione vitae religiosae*

²⁹ Cf. Libero Gerosa, *Charisma und Recht*, 71 f.

³⁰ Friedrich Wulf, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Chapter VI: Religious,” trans. Richard Strachan. *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 5 vols., ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967-1969, 1:273-84), 278.

³¹ Confoy, *Religious Life in the Vatican II Era*, 325. For further reading Confoy recommends Ian Linden, *Global Catholicism: Diversity and Change since Vatican II* (New York: Columbia University, 2009), esp. chap. 10, and Friedrich Wulf, “Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life,” *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, (New York: Herder, 1968) 2:301-70.

in 1964, and arriving at its final title *Perfectae Caritatis* on October 1965, is a result of “moving from a juridical approach, to its [religious life] interior personal dynamisms, to its rich ecclesial and spiritual dimensions.”³² It is the perfection of love rather than the three evangelical counsels which distinguishes the Christian made in the image and likeness of God and called to holiness. A commitment to the counsels of celibacy, poverty and obedience is not an end in itself but a means to testify in an exemplary fashion (*Lumen Gentium* 31) to love of God and neighbor.³³ This is the unique charism of the consecrated life for the Church!³⁴

Perfectae Caritatis sets out principles for a timely renewal of communities and points to a dual challenge: firstly, the return to the sources of Christian life and to the spirit of the origin of the community, and secondly to adapt to the conditions of the times. Renewal and adaptation are not to be considered antagonistically; rather they are interdependent and indispensable in order for religious life to continuously fructify the holiness of the Church.³⁵ Already in its opening paragraph *Perfectae Caritatis* signals clearly the charismatic dimension of the religious communities by calling attention to their originality on account of “a great variety of gifts.” *Perfectae Caritatis* 1 reads:

Indeed from the very beginning of the Church, men and women have set about following Christ with greater freedom and imitating Him more closely through the practice of the evangelical counsels, each in his own way leading a life dedicated to God. Many of them, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, lived as hermits or founded religious families, which the Church gladly welcomed and approved by her authority. So it is that in accordance with the Divine Plan a wonderful variety of religious communities has grown up which has made it easier for the Church not only to be equipped for every good work (cf. 2 Tim 3:17) and ready for the work of the ministry—the building up of the Body of Christ (cf. Eph 4:12)—but also to appear adorned with the various gifts of her children like a spouse adorned for her husband (cf. Rev 21:2) and for the manifold Wisdom of God to be revealed through her (cf. Eph 3:10).

While this paragraph does not mention charism *per se* we can detect implicit allusions to a variety of gifts that the consecrated life contributes to the Church. Above all religious institutes came into being “under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit” and “in accordance with the divine plan” they foreshadow the eschaton. Moreover, the gift of the consecrated life facilitates the Church’s

³² M. Prudence Allen, R.S.M. and Judith O’Brien, R.S.M., “The Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*.” Matthew L. Lamb, Matthew Levering, *Vatican II Renewal within Tradition* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008: 251-270), 251.

³³ See footnote 2.

³⁴ Friedrich Wulf, “Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life,” 313.

³⁵ See PC 2e.

ministry, above all her holiness. By approving a religious institute the Church simultaneously acknowledges the authenticity of the charism. Article 2b makes an essential statement concerning the significance of the founder. "Therefore let their founders' spirit and special aims they set before them as well as their sound traditions – all of which make up the patrimony of each institute – be faithfully held in honor." The *mens fundatoris* as well as his or her *propria proposita* make up the core of the institute's *patrimonium*. It seems surprising that the formulation uses spirit instead of charism of the founder especially since the unique gift—charism—of the founder is addressed here.³⁶ The word *patrimonium* highlights the spiritual heritage belonging to the institute which constitutes its unique profile, identity, and mission in and for the Church. The charism of the founder makes up the heart of the institute's spiritual heritage and will color the evolving customs and traditions.³⁷ *Perfectae Caritatis* 8 highlights that the communities distinguish themselves "according to the grace which is allotted to them." The charismatic profile of the communities is perceived as an integrating factor and also as a contribution to the diversity of the Church.

Commentators on the effects of Vatican II point out that *Perfectae Caritatis* ranked among the weakest and most limited of all the Council documents. The polarization that characterized the committees that produced the document has continued throughout subsequent decades, and extended its influence to the Catholic community at large.³⁸

II.3. The Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*

Vatican II's decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem* is closely affiliated with *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*. The decree highlights that the laity "share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ

³⁶ Rocca notes that charism was part of the drafts which spoke of "doni carismatici concessi ai fondatori" and "carattere carismatico degli istituti religiosi." Giancarlo Rocca, *Il carisma del fondatore*, 27.

³⁷ Herzig, Anneliese. „Ordens-Christen“: *Theologie des Ordenslebens in der Zeit nach dem Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil* (Würzburg: Echter, 1991), 338..

³⁸ Confoy, *Religious Life in the Vatican II Era*, 329. Friedrich Wulf, *Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life*, 301. Wulf writes that there was little unity in the document, or in the commission that produced it. Evident throughout the deliberations were the different approaches to, and understandings of, religious life among the authors of not only *Perfectae Caritatis* but also *Lumen Gentium* chapters V and VI. For example, it was consistently questioned whether the traditional doctrine of the counsels, which so decisively characterized the self-understanding of the religious orders of the past could still be maintained in the post-conciliar years. See Friedrich Wulf, *Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life*, 306.

and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole People of God in the Church and in the world.”³⁹ The particular aim toward which the laity exercise their apostolate and offer their unique gifts should be “directed to the evangelization and sanctification of men and to the penetrating and perfecting of the temporal order through the spirit of the Gospel.”⁴⁰

Apostolicam Actuositatem 3 connects the charism of the laity with *Lumen Gentium* 12.2 teaching that “with the acceptance of these charisms, including those which are more elementary, there arises for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and the building up of the Church, in the freedom of the Holy Spirit.” Moreover, laity should offer their gifts “in communion with their brothers in Christ, especially with their pastors who must make a judgment about the true nature and proper use of these gifts not to extinguish the Spirit but to test all things and hold for what is good (cf. 1 Thess 5:12,19,21).”⁴¹

With regard to the specific gifts and role of the laity—the sanctification of the world—*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 5 emphasizes, that “the Christian laity exercise their apostolate both in the Church and in the world, in both the spiritual and the temporal orders.” Chapter IV deals with the various forms of the lay apostolate. “The laity can engage in their apostolic activity either as individuals or together as members of various groups or associations.”⁴² The document gives primary consideration to those lay communities “which promote and encourage closer unity between the concrete life of the members and their faith.”⁴³ Implicitly such a statement can be interpreted as recognition of ecclesial movements joined together in the dynamic force of their charism.

III. The post-conciliar era

On the threshold of the third millennium John Paul II asserted that “the Council’s enormously rich body of teaching and *the striking new tone* in the way it presented this content constitute as it were a proclamation of new times.”⁴⁴ Arguably next to the liturgical new tones, it is the religious life whose transformation has and continues to intone new rhythms and melodies in search for listeners. While the understanding of the religious life and the recognition of

³⁹ AA 2. Cf. LG 56.

⁴⁰ AA 2.

⁴¹ AA 3. Cf. LG 12.

⁴² AA 15.

⁴³ AA 19. Cf. AA 18 which places the common apostolate of the laity in the context of the ecclesiology of communion.

⁴⁴ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter in Preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000 *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (November 10, 1994), 20 (emphasis in original).

its importance for the Church of the future energized many after the Council to launch new vistas of renewal and collaboration within individual religious communities as well as between congregations of a similar patrimony, “many Council Fathers were fearful of what might be let loose as the well-educated and committed religious envisaged alternative ways of living their charism in different ministerial contexts.”⁴⁵

III.1. Return to the Patrimony

The variety and occasional inconsistent interpretations of the meaning of renewal and adaptation, along with the Church’s expectations for the post-conciliar religious life and ministry, generated a range of publications both from the Vatican and from conciliar participants. Half a year after the conclusion of the Council, Paul VI on August 6, 1966 promulgated *motu proprio* the apostolic letter *Ecclesiae Sanctae*. In its second part *Ecclesiae Sanctae* responds to the mandate of *Perfectae Caritatis* 1 which had announced that the particular norms of the religious life will be determined after the council. *Ecclesiae Sanctae* regulates that the implementation of the spirit and practice of religious life should happen through the lens of the “founding stories, rules, and constitutions” of the religious order. Taking a scriptural rather than a juridical approach, the renewal should aim at enabling “religious to minister more effectively in the church and society of their cultural contexts.”⁴⁶ No mention is made of charism in this papal teaching. Instead Paul VI generously promised that “experimentations in things against the common law, a matter to be done with prudence, will be gladly permitted by the Holy See as opportunity warrants.”⁴⁷

Presumably, this openness and support from the pope could have provided a seedbed for vocations and thus a new springtime for the consecrated life. “But no such blossoming took place: vocations dropped; dispensations from vows increased.”⁴⁸ Many communities struggled with surveying their archival materials, calling for general chapters, and setting in motion the process of renewal—all of it within the required three year period of time. In 1969 two directives were promulgated from the now called Congregation for the Religious and Secular Institutes. *Renovationis causam* confirmed that all renewal and adaptation is to be guided by the spirit of the founder. In addition, candidates were to be “trained to dedicate themselves to activities in keeping with the

⁴⁵ Confoy, *Religious Life in the Vatican II Era*, 328

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 334–35.

⁴⁷ Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Ecclesiae Sanctae* issued *Motu Proprio* (Aug. 6, 1966), II, I, 6a. AAS 58 (1966), 757–87.

⁴⁸ Enid Williamson, *The Notion of Charism in the Religious Life*, 109.

purpose of their institutes.”⁴⁹ On August 15, *Venite seorsum* reminded contemplative religious that their charism and life-style were their form of apostolate and decisive for the Church (2a).

In spite of these directives, superiors, general chapters and their advisers often lacked the necessary training in theology and canon law to set into motion and accompany the mandatory process of renewal. Especially female communities were at a loss and had to rely in many cases on clerical and secular advisors who, while well intentioned, may have lacked sensitivity for the community’s charism.⁵⁰ Thus this period for revisions and the re-conquest of the patrimony was filled with experiments frequently reaping snowballing unrest among religious. The changing of constitutions, governance structures, apostolic works, and even community life, was perceived by some as detrimental to the institute’s original charism and their personal vocation. Others turned to psychological or sociological guidance and support to break open convent walls sometimes perhaps confusing the accidental with the essential.⁵¹

The tensions connected with the changes in Europe are aptly described by Bishop Huyghe: “Some have completely accepted this new world along with its dangers and hopes. Resolutely detached from the sociological milieu in which former generations lived, they are alert to the needs of the people who now expect a new type of evangelization. Others cling desperately to the earlier forms of religious and apostolic life which, they declare, have stood the test of years; and in the shelter of their institutions which have become for them a sort of artificial Christianity, they do not see that the world is being formed without them and, unfortunately, without the message of Christ which they should be bringing to it.”⁵² In the United States “wearing a habit as a symbol of consecration (and, therefore, separation from the world) and maintaining institutional works in preference to newer services in the public sphere (again, a curtailment of involvement in the world) were particularly controverted points.”⁵³

⁴⁹ Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, Instruction on the Renewal of Religious Formation *Renovationis Causam* (January 6, 1969), 13:2.

⁵⁰ An excellent source for the many challenges faced by sisters see: Ann Carey, *Sisters in Crisis Revisited: From Unraveling to Reform and Renewal*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013), passim.

⁵¹ M. Prudence Allen, R.S.M. and Judith O’Brien, R.S.M., The Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life, 257-58.

⁵² Gérard Huyghe, *Tensions and Change: The Problems of Religious Orders Today*, trans. Sister Marie Florette (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), 7.

⁵³ Lora Quiñonez and Mary Daniel Turner, *The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1992), 42. See also Maria Augusta Neal, *Catholic Sisters in Transition: From the 1960s to the 1980s*, (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984), 16. Neal sur-

On June 29, 1971, Paul VI addressed this relationship between the founder's charism and his followers for the first time in a magisterial document. The apostolic letter *Evangelica testificatio* is again dedicated to the renewal of religious life and constitutes a certain development of the conciliar texts.⁵⁴ The pope highlights in article 11 "the charisms of your founders who were raised up by God within His Church" as "one of the principles for the present renewal and one of the most secure criteria for judging what each institute should undertake." Reiterating the Council's specifications, *Evangelica testificatio* reminds the communities of the consecrated life to remain loyal to the spirit of their founders and to the example of their sanctity. This patrimony will enable them to embrace "the charism of the religious life" and abstain "from a mentality which conforms itself to the modern world."⁵⁵ Paul VI establishes here a relationship between the charism of the founder and that of religious life. They condition one another and are evidently given to each member. A careful reading implies that an individual may be initially attracted to and sense a vocation for a particular institute's charism, and only secondarily a vocation to the consecrated life, and vice versa.

Thirteen years after the closing of the Council *Mutuae Relationes* (MR) was the first post-conciliar document to explicitly place the founder's charism in the context of *Lumen Gentium* ecclesiology of communion.⁵⁶ Promulgated by the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes in collaboration with the Congregation for Bishops the directives stress that the specificity of a religious community is a gift of the Spirit for the communion of the Church, and is entrusted to her as a contribution to the fulfillment of her mission. Moreover, *Mutuae Relationes* describes the charism of a founder as the experience of the Holy Spirit in his or her life. This charism is then passed on to the followers, among whom it can be lived, maintained, deepened and constantly creatively unfolded in harmony with the universal Church (III, 11). Each community is to develop a profile with a "certain genuine originality" appropriate to their lifestyle that characterizes its tradition and can be simultaneously a stimulus for the spiritual life of the universal Church (III, 12). The document explicates that the "distinctive character" of an institute is made visible through "a par-

veyed over 139,000 sisters to "determine the readiness of American sisters to implement the directives of the Vatican Council."

⁵⁴ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of the Religious Life according to the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council *Evangelica Testificatio* (June 29, 1971).

⁵⁵ Cf. LG 45, PC 2 b.

⁵⁶ Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes, Sacred Congregation for Bishops, Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church *Mutuae Relationes* (May 14, 1978).

ticular style of sanctification and apostolate which creates a definite tradition.” This in turn is essential in order that the danger of an ill-defined situation be avoided, lest religious, failing to give due consideration to the particular mode of action proper to their character, become part of the life of the Church in a vague and ambiguous manner” (III, 11). Among “the signs of a genuine charism,” *Mutuae Relationes* lists fidelity to the Lord, docility to His Spirit, a prudent and careful reading of the signs of the times, a will to be integrated into the church and obedience to the hierarchy, boldness in initiatives, and persevering in offering the gift of self. *Mutuae Relationes* acknowledges that acceptance of a charism includes embracing the cross of interior suffering for the sake of the fruitfulness of the gift received. The document reminds superiors of “the grave duty ... to pay full attention to the fidelity of their members to the charism of the founder” (III, 12).

As they endeavored to implement these instructions and reconnect with their “founding identity,” some congregations realized that they did not have a founder in the way the document assumed. “They had come into being not because of any charism handed on by a founder, but rather as a consequence of a ministerial need at a particular time, and at the invitation or mandate of a bishop or other founding cleric.”⁵⁷ As a result, the process of renewal and adaptation in those communities without a specific charism or founder concentrated mainly on exterior forms of appearance; for example, the reorganization of government structures, experimentations with community life, and the religious garb.

Other orders whose founders intended a lifestyle too progressive for their time, were quick and at times radical in exchanging their monastic asceticism for a contemporary ministry and lifestyle.⁵⁸ Ian Linden asserts: “Changes ... were dramatic as a result of a wider interpretation of the ‘charism’ of each Society’s founder: from a pervasive subordination to authority in the convent and work circumscribed by bishops, to a spiritual life in small communities employed in innovative forms of catechetical, social or medical work.”⁵⁹ In retrospect the question may be raised whether in their discernment congregations clearly distinguished between charism, mission, and ministry. The latter may be an expression of but not identical with the charism.

⁵⁷ Joseph A. Komonchak, “Interpreting the Council and its Consequences: Concluding Reflections,” *After Vatican II: Trajectories and Hermeneutics*, ed. James L. Heft, with John O’Malley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012: 164- 72), 164-65.

⁵⁸ Confoy, *Religious Life in the Vatican II Era*, 335.

⁵⁹ Ian Linden, *Global Catholicism: Diversity and Change since Vatican II* (New York: Columbia University, 2009), 271.

III. 2. Ecclesial Movements

In 1967 Paul VI established the Pontifical Council for the Laity in accordance with Apostolicam Actuositatem 26. In so doing he signaled openness to the new communities which he intended to graft on the trunk of religious and lay ecclesial associations. While this opened up a new spectrum of service to and collaboration within the Church, "it cannot be ignored that this was disturbing both within the ranks of religious themselves, who felt that they were being passed over, and among the laity who looked for carefully differentiated levels of leadership."⁶⁰

Especially during the pontificate of John Paul II we observe a growing openness to the Church's reception of new ecclesial community forms. In contrast to the religious and charity oriented congregations founded before Vatican II, these ecclesial movements depend vitally and essentially on their spiritual relationship to the founder because of his or her charism. Members of these foundations—priests and laity—discover the central position of the founder—who is in Christ the *susceptor primus* of the charism—as a life-giving and uniting force. Ch. Hegge notes as characteristic for all the new ecclesial movements: "*movens* and *centrum* is the charism of the founder personality which becomes the personal vocation of all members."⁶¹ As a spiritual family, members of the movements quite naturally unite around their founder. They consciously maintain a personal relationship with him or her which at the same time nourishes their loyalty to their common charism. The participation of the individual in the founder's charism creates a personal and communal relationship through which founder, community and each member are united. This unity leads to a common destiny and finds expression in creative loyalty to the founder's charism.⁶² Indeed, the charism given to these founders apparently includes an original inspiration of preserving the grace of unity.⁶³

⁶⁰ Confoy, *Religious Life in the Vatican II Era*, 335.

⁶¹ Christoph Hegge, *Rezeption und Charisma*, 226.

⁶² Virginia Parodi, *Beziehung zum Gründer und Treue zum Gründungscharisma*, 303.

⁶³ Regis J. Armstrong, Wayne Hellman and William J. Short, *Francis of Assisi: The Saint: Early Documents*, vol. 1 (New York: New City Press, 1999), 223. Cf. in this context *Edward Pentin's interview with the new General Director of the Legionaries of Christ*, Father Eduardo Robles Gil who opines: "Canon law states that religious should live according to the mind of the founders, but never does it equate this with fidelity to the particular individual who received the inspiration." *National Catholic Register* (July 13, 2014), <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/legion-of-christs-new-general-director-discusses-the-congregations-road-ahe#ix-zz38CkAgyBU>.

III. 3. New Juridical Norms

On May 31, 1983, half a year before the promulgation of the new Canon Law, the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes released "Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate." The text mentions the founding charism several times without actually defining its implication for a congregation. Nevertheless the document stresses the importance of the charism for the life and work of a community and each member. Article 25 notes that the Church commits to the institute their founding charism and expects in return a life loyal to this gift. This implies to forego the temptation "to leave works which are stable and a genuine expression of the institute's charism for others which seem more immediately relevant to social needs but which are less expressive of the institute's identity" (27). Instead, by fostering "the vitality of the institute's charism" the community testifies to its transforming power and by persevering it gives "eloquent witness of the religious to the faithful God whose love is without end" (37). Each religious institute is reminded that "the authentic discernment of its founding charism" depends "on the God-given ministry of the hierarchy" (41). Finally, article 46 clarifies that "the ongoing configuration to Christ comes about according to the charism and provisions of the institute to which the religious belongs."

The new Code of Canon Law (CIC) groups Religious and Secular Institutes together with Societies of Apostolic Life in Book II, Part III as Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (cc 573-755). Accordingly, when speaking of the charism of these communities, Canon Law considers henceforth the entire scope of the consecrated life of which religious life is an important, though not the only part! Canon Lawyer and religious sister Enid Williamson is of the opinion that "the notion of charism, its general acceptance and development is equally important when we are considering all branches of consecrated life; the Church for whose sake the gift is given, will be the poorer if this is not understood on all sides, and the charisms of the different institutes fully lived and respected."⁶⁴ It is surprising and somewhat disappointing that the CIC's section on Associations of the Faithful does not make mention of the charismatic gifts of these groups. Does this mean that the charism of the ecclesial associations is of no importance? Hegge regrets that the CIC 1983 assumes the regulation from the CIC 1917 although the charismatic dimension of the ecclesial movements has been acknowledged and proclaimed by John Paul II before 1983.⁶⁵ Canonists like Gerosa interpret this deficiency as the failure of

⁶⁴ Enid Williamson, *The Notion of Charism in the Religious Life*, 100-101.

⁶⁵ See *ibid.*, 228.

the new code to replace permanently the *societas* ecclesiology of the CIC 1917 with the *communio* ecclesiology of Vatican II.⁶⁶

Canon 577 echoes *Perfectae Caritatis* 1 that “in the Church there are a great many institutes of consecrated life which have different gifts according to the grace which has been given them.” Canon 578 emphasizes that “all must observe faithfully the *mind and designs of the founders regarding the nature, purpose, spirit, and character of an institute*, which have been sanctioned by competent ecclesiastical authority, and its sound traditions, all of which constitute the *patrimony of the same institute*.”⁶⁷ Canon 602 stipulates that “the fraternal life proper to each institute” should bring about “a special family in Christ” whose spirit is recognized by its charism. Religious Institutes are to maintain a measure of separation from the world as is “proper to the character and purpose of each institute.” Canon 607 draws attention to the special character and purpose of each institute which determines “in its constitutions the manner in which the evangelical counsels ... are to be observed in its way of life.” Canon 659 stresses the necessity for pre-novitiate formation so that aspirants are prepared to “lead the life proper to the institute more fully, and fulfill its mission more effectively.” The stipulation to define the nature and duration of this formation is rooted in the responsibility for the transmission and maintenance of the charism.⁶⁸

III.4. Manifestations of the Founding Charism

By this time the adaptation and renewal process had been completed and many institutes of the consecrated life had submitted their revised constitutions for approval to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Yet the confusion and turmoil that characterized their early response to Vatican II's call continued for some institutes into the next decades. Review and revision of their founding charism and the examination of the trajectories of their congregations led for some communities to the redirection of ministries and to the consequent adaptation of a suitable lifestyle to engage in such ministries. The mandate for a “preferential option for the poor” rather than for a maintenance of established ministries was taking shape in the context of new levels of collaboration of religious and laity in education, health care, and welfare initiatives. Sandra Schneiders observes that congregations typically begin “in the charismatic experience of one or more founders who feel impelled to give themselves to God and God's work, almost always in

⁶⁶ Cf. Libero Gerosa, *Charisma und Recht*, 236.

⁶⁷ My emphasis.

⁶⁸ Enid Williamson, *The Notion of Charism in the Religious Life*, 111-12.

response to some historically pressing need. Subsequent members respond to a personal call to join the founders in this divinely originated enterprise.”⁶⁹

During the pontificate of John Paul II we observe a fundamental change in the reception of new forms of communities in the church. The Polish Pontiff was very receptive for the charismatic communal paradigm of lay associations and movements. Just like the traditional religious orders he acknowledged that these new forms are a gift of the Holy Spirit due to the charism given to their founders. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* of 1988—a kind of ‘Magna Charta’ of vocation and mission of the laity in the church—officially recognizes that the new religious communities are equal among the other already existing forms in the church and that the charismatic origin of the new communities cannot be doubted.⁷⁰ Article 24 is dedicated to charisms. It highlights that charisms are bestowed by the Holy Spirit “both as a manifestation of the absolute freedom of the Spirit who abundantly supplies them, and as a response to the varied needs of the Church in history.” Charisms “whether they be exceptional and great or simple and ordinary, [are] given to individual persons, and can even be shared by others in such ways as to continue in time a precious and effective heritage.” They are always either directly or indirectly ordered “to the building up of the Church, to the well-being of humanity and to the needs of the world.”

In 1994, John Paul II convoked and held the Synod of the Bishops on the Consecrated Life from which resulted the 1996 Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (VC). The Post-Synodal Letter “on the Consecrated Life and its Mission in the Church and in the World” suggested that, rather than speaking of the “founder’s charism” as in *Evangelica Testificatio*, it is more accurate to speak of the “founding charism,” because as long as the institute is alive, it is in a state of “founding.” This concept helps to move beyond the notion of a stable charism as identified with a specific ministry and allows ministries to evolve with the needs of the time. Already seven years earlier, Bernard Lee, SM, suggested that charism is in essence about “the deep story” of community, which defines a group identity. Thus, charism is viewed as a relational event that has a specific and social context. Lee concluded that a charism is not automatically transmitted to a later historical context. Rather, in order to bring a charism into a future period of history, Lee noted, persons must identify with the “deep story” as they respond to a new social context with the essen-

⁶⁹ Sandra M. Schneiders, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Women Religious Bearing Witness to the Gospel in a Troubled Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 100.

⁷⁰ John Paul II. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World *Christifideles Laici* (December 30, 1988), 23-24.

tial spirit of the charism.⁷¹ *Vita Consecrata* 37 invites Institutes of Consecrated Life to “courageously propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today’s world.” The presupposition for this endeavor is that institutes “develop a dynamic fidelity to their mission” while remaining “faithful to an Institute’s original inspiration.”

At the conclusion of the Jubilee Year 2000 John Paul II proposed the pastoral program the Church is to adopt in the newest epoch. His Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*⁷² reminds the faithful of the “necessity to rediscover the full practical significance of the universal call to holiness.”⁷³ To meet this challenge, John Paul II insisted that a concrete “training of holiness” is required, which above all must include a “spiritual path” without which “external structures ... will serve very little purpose.”⁷⁴ To present the Church with an education towards holiness, the Pontiff launched a challenge to the traditional as well as the more recent forms of support offered in associations and movements recognized by the Church to enrich the faithful with their particular charism.⁷⁵ He was convinced that such groups can inspire Christians of whatever state or rank to commit themselves more radically to the perfection of charity. With this invitation, John Paul II placed groups of the consecrated life on the same track as lay movements reminding them of their purpose to favor the holiness of the people.

Alluding to this message the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life issued “Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium” on May 19, 2002. Part Three treats of the Spirituality of Communion and elaborates *inter alia* on the communion between old and new charisms. The document notes that by “opening themselves to communion with other Institutes and other forms of consecration, they can spread communion, rediscover their common Gospel roots and together grasp the beauty of their own identity in the variety of charisms with greater clarity.” Moreover, institutes are encouraged to avoid facing their future in isolation. Instead, they should seek dialogue and communion among one another including the „new forms of evangelical life.” Such

⁷¹ Bernard Lee, “A Socio-Historical Theology of Charism,” *Review for Religious* 48 (January-February 1989), 124-135. Ibid. *The Beating of Great Wings* (New London, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 2004), 16-35.

⁷² John Paul II. Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* to the bishops, clergy and faithful at the close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. January 6, 2001. Henceforth cited: NMI.

⁷³ Ibid., 30.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁷⁵ See NMI 31.

encounters of communion can awaken new life especially through “the example of evangelical and charismatic freshness such as the generous, creative initiatives in evangelization” of the ecclesial movements. Likewise, the new forms of evangelical life “can learn a great deal from the faithful, joyful and charismatic witness of consecrated life which bears a very rich spiritual patrimony, the many treasures of experience and wisdom and a great variety of apostolates and missionary commitments” (30).

IV. Concluding remarks

Nearly fifty years after Vatican II, the Church, including her communities of the consecrated life, is still groping with a comprehensive reception of its teaching. In his 2005 Christmas address to the Roman Curia, Benedict XVI raised the straightforward question: “Why has the implementation of the Council, in large parts of the Church, thus far been so difficult?” In his opinion, “the problems in its implementation arose from the fact that two contrary hermeneutics came face to face and quarreled with each other.” Concretely, he speaks of “a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture” which quarrels with a “hermeneutic of reform.” What pope emeritus Benedict XVI says of the Church as a whole, applies also, as we have seen, to the state of the consecrated life, in particular with religious institutes who struggled with the patrimony of the institute with which they were accepted into the Church before Vatican II.

In conclusion we may ask ourselves which lessons we can learn from this history for the future? I would like to offer the following five pointers.

1. The Institutes of the Consecrated Life which have formed throughout history, including those of recent times, are all concrete forms of a *sequela Christi*. They contribute with their respective charisms to the full revelation of Christ and of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. Hence these communities are dependent on and complementary to each other. Mutual respect and appreciation of each other's gifts and patrimony is perhaps the most beautiful fruit of the Spirit's activity in our time since it generates communion among all the charisms within the Church. On the other hand, vying with each other for vocations and ministry or insisting exclusively on one's own patrimony above others, denies “the Church a vitality that is God's gift and a true springtime of the Spirit.”⁷⁶
2. None of the Council's documents addresses the impact of a founder's charism to his or her followers. In fact not even the founder's relationship to his charism is mentioned. This comes as a surprise since

⁷⁶ NMI 46.

founders and communities are usually recipients of a charism. In fact, none of the documents we have studied in this article offer a theological reflection on the significance of a charism for the consecrated life. This area urgently awaits further study and clarity. Speaking in biblical terms, a charism is offered to an individual and not to a community. In fact, some communities never concerned themselves with their founder.

3. This leads us to the question concerning the importance of a founder for the continuity of a congregation. Whereas pre-conciliar documents pointed above all to the exemplary character of founders and their heroic surrender to the Church, post-conciliar reflection sheds light on the unique traits of their charisms and their audacity in interpreting the signs of the time. This of course is in accordance with the communion ecclesiology which not only freely acknowledges the existence of charisms of founders and communities, but relies on them. A fruitful renewal and adaptation in the spirit of Vatican II therefore challenges communities with a lesser bond to their founder and patrimony to study the origins of their institute. They should at least know who their founder was, when he lived and the circumstances that led to their foundation with a rule, ministry, and vision.
4. Vatican II's mandatory renewal and adaptation and the subsequent self-inspection of the religious institutes was accompanied by confusion, crisis and possibly by a resulting stagnation of the consecrated life. How could this have been avoided? Many answers could be given. One of the lessons we may have learned and which is crucial for vocation offices, is that having a vocation to the consecrated life is only the first step in the discernment. The follow up questions need to clarify the kind of community and ministry suiting the aspirant.
5. Corresponding to the charism of a founder we can perhaps also speak of the charism given to his or her followers which together becomes the founding charism. Acceptance and identification with the patrimony will enable members to fully make of themselves a gift to the Church in exercising the mission entrusted to them. The same spirit of communion will guide institutes of the consecrated life to remain faithful to the principles of the original patrimony as they are discerning the signs of the times, and if necessary, to adapt it to new situations, forms and needs. Accepting and responding to the charism in its founding and ongoing quality could be an effective means to prevent a hermeneutic of discontinuity.

It is worth our while for institutes of the consecrated life to discover, reflect, treasure and take their community's charism as motivation for their doing and acting. After all, it is God's gift of love tailored for them and thus a sure means and security on the pathway leading them and those entrusted to their care to the *perfection of charity*!

